

Seeing a neurologist for epilepsy care - whether for the first time or for a follow-up visit - can be extremely stressful, and frequently patients may leave feeling dissatisfied. Patients may forget particular questions or concerns, and physicians may focus on history and exam because of time constraints. During a visit, specific information that you should share with your neurologist includes details about your seizures, medications and their side effects, social issues and any other concerns or questions. Your physician should discuss with you diagnostic testing if appropriate and a treatment plan, answering your questions regarding epilepsy in general but also about your care in particular.

Your doctor will be asking you for details regarding your seizures, including the behavioral manifestations of your seizures, your seizure frequency and any potential for associated injury. Many patients do not recall the details of their seizures and often underestimate their total number of events. In the office setting, family input is a valuable resource in assessing seizure control and severity. Surprisingly, many patients come to the office alone, have not discussed with their family the details of their seizures, and know only vaguely what happens to them during a typical episode. Obtaining specific information from family and friends prior to seeing your physician will serve as a very useful tool in your evaluation.

Other vital issues regarding your treatment include efficacy and side effects of anti-epileptic medications. While drug therapy is the mainstay of epilepsy treatment, medication side effects may be as disabling as the seizures themselves. Many of these drugs have side effects in common like dizziness, drowsiness, fatigue, or concentration/memory difficulties. Each drug may also have unique side effects that should be discussed in detail with your physician before starting treatment. Again, family and friends play an important role in assessing potential side effects as some individuals may experience subtle physical or behavioral changes that may not be obvious to the individual but may be clear to family and friends.

The quality of a patient's life including general medical health and social well-being are just as important to your neurologist as seizure frequency. Questions regarding driving restrictions, seizure precautions and independence need to be addressed in the office. Additional medical considerations include issues of fertility, sleep, health and mood. During a busy office visit, some of these may be overlooked. Thinking about and discussing them with family in advance may help you to discuss them with your neurologist in the office. While the Internet and other resource material may be helpful with general information, the primary source of information regarding your epilepsy should be your physician.

One of the most common complaints of patients is that their physicians do not talk to them enough about their epilepsy, their treatment plan, or their expected response to treatment. Patients may feel like “medication is just being increased” or they are to “come back in 6 months.” Many patients have undergone diagnostic testing like MRI and EEG but do not know the results. Defining whether one has a partial or generalized seizure disorder may guide therapy and potential treatment options. Ask your physician for the results of any tests and what those results suggest about your epilepsy. Increasing treatment options (for example, newer medications and surgery) are available. Only through discussion with your physician can you determine what options are best for you.

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